UNITED
NATIONS

A

General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/49/470
5 October 1994
ENGLISH
ORIGINAL: ENGLISH/FRENCH

Forty-ninth session
Agenda item 37 (b)

STRENGTHENING OF THE COORDINATION OF HUMANITARIAN AND DISASTER RELIEF ASSISTANCE OF THE UNITED NATIONS, INCLUDING SPECIAL ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE: SPECIAL ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE TO INDIVIDUAL COUNTRIES OR REGIONS

Summary reports on Benin, the Central African Republic and Madagascar

Report of the Secretary-General

I. BENIN

A. Background

1. In its resolution 47/159 of 18 December 1993, the General Assembly noted that the financial crisis that Benin was undergoing had led to a slowing down of its economic and social development, and that the disastrous consequences of repeated floods during the previous 10 years, alternating with periods of drought and pluviometric disturbances, were a major impediment to the implementation of development policies and strategies.

2. The General Assembly appealed to States, the international financial institutions of the United Nations, humanitarian organizations and voluntary agencies to respond generously and urgently to the needs of Benin and to continue and increase their assistance in response to the reconstruction, economic recovery and development needs of the country.

B. Economic and financial situation

3. Benin continued and consolidated its good economic performance and improved the macroeconomic policy framework based on political and economic liberalization. The gross domestic product has continued to grow in real terms, by 4.1 per cent in 1992 and 3.6 per cent in 1993. As in previous years, food

production is excedentary and the country is self-sufficient. However, imports continued to grow while exports remained stable throughout 1992-1993, thus aggravating the structural balance-of-payments deficit.

4. Improved mobilization of foreign resources through the structural adjustment programmes has reduced the deficit to a sustainable level (10 per cent of the gross domestic product). The volume of the public investment programme has grown in 1993 to approximately US$ 61 million against $50 million in 1992.

5. The banking sector has been reinforced through the opening of a new international bank. Prices remained relatively stable in 1993, with a rate of inflation of only 2.4 per cent, at least until the devaluation on 12 January 1994 of the national currency, the CFA franc, which resulted in an inflation rate of 52 per cent, eroding incomes and increasing social vulnerability.

C. Follow-up to the Round-table Conference

6. With the assistance of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Government of Benin held a Round-table Conference of Donors at Geneva on 2 and 3 April 1992. The Government of Benin reported on the results achieved from the implementation of the first and second structural adjustment programmes, and presented sectoral strategies and priorities to the donors, who welcomed the Government's declared intention of integrating the social aspects of development into its macroeconomic policies and achieving a greater degree of equity and participation in national development.

7. Of the six sectoral consultations planned (see A/47/337, para. 14), only two have so far taken place. The sectors, lead donor countries or agencies and dates were:

(a) Infrastructure and transports, World Bank, 14-15 October 1993;

(b) Social dimension of development, Germany, 20-21 June 1994.

8. Work on the remaining four sectoral consultations is at different stages of preparation, permitting the following tentative schedule:

(a) Rural development, France/World Bank, October 1994;

(b) Private sector, West African Development Bank/France, 3-4 November 1994;

(c) Health, European Union, December 1994;

(d) Education, France/United States of America, first quarter of 1995.

9. The first two sectoral consultations resulted in the mobilization of important financial resources amounting to $120 million and $16 million, respectively.

10. The country continues to benefit from important external aid flows from the international community. In 1993 this flow attained $156.6 million, against $134 million in 1992.

11. External assistance in connection with the structural adjustment programme amounted to $65 million or 23.7 per cent of the public investment programme, $1.8 million for the social emergency programme and $15.8 million from debt rescheduling.

12. Despite the important influx of external financial aid, the principal challenge for Benin will be the control of distortions in the wake of the devaluation which are a menace to the restructurization and redeployment of the economy. Social tensions, exacerbated by political strife, are threatening the national cohesion at a moment when the country needs to mobilize solidarity for the development effort.

II. CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

A. Background

13. In its resolution 47/159, the General Assembly noted the grave difficulties that the Government of the Central African Republic had continued to face since 1982 in achieving the objectives of its development programme, owing to the harmful effects of the international economic situation. The Assembly appealed to the international community to continue and increase its assistance to the Central African Republic.

B. Priorities for action

14. Legislative and presidential elections were held in August-September 1993. The newly established Government then announced the general development orientations: getting the public administration and the Government back to work, setting the pace for economic recovery, and refurbishing the public finances. In more specific terms, the leading priorities are a sustainable increase in national output; a strengthening of the public administration system; social and human resources development; preservation and protection of the environment; and strengthening of the capability in national planning and economic management.

15. A donors consultation meeting for the Central African Republic was convened in May 1994 at Bangui by the Government, with the assistance of UNDP. It was an opportunity for discussion between the Government and donors concerning economic and financial strategies, planning priorities and sectoral policies. In follow-up to the meeting, consultations on the health sectors between the Government and donors are scheduled for November 1994 while consultations on education, training and employment are expected to be held in mid-1995. Copies of documentation relating to the meeting may be obtained from UNDP or the Government of the Central African Republic.

C. Assistance received

16. Previous reports of the Secretary-General indicated areas of support provided by the international community to the Central African Republic as the Government implemented the earlier stages of the five-year development plan and the structural adjustment programme. The table shows external assistance to the Central African Republic for the period from 1990-1993, as actually received and, in parentheses, as had been anticipated.

External assistance to the Central African Republic, 1990-1993

(Billions of CFA francs)

	1990		1991		1992		1993	
Investment	28.8	(36.7)	26.0	(36.6)	27.92	(31.88)	25.20	(29.7)
Technical assistance	13.7	(13.7)	11.0	(11.0)	22.52	(22.52)	20.00	(23.7)
State budget, of which debt relief	26.8 3.1	(24.0) (1.5)	16.5 -	(17.0) (-)	5.40 -	(8.76)	20.00 7.69	(23.7) (8.80)
Total	69.3	(74.4)	53.5	(64.6)	55.94	(62.56)	65.20	(75.21)

Source: Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Economic Affairs and Planning, Central African Republic.

17. The figures indicate that, in the period from 1990 to 1993, total external assistance to the Republic was less than had been expected and also that total external assistance to the country increased slightly in 1993 as compared with the two previous years.

D. Assessment of needs unmet and proposals for responding to them

18. The total budget deficit for 1994 is estimated at 234 billion CFA francs, of which 88 billion will be covered from internal sources and 109.6 billion from external resources, leaving a deficit of 36.4 billion to be met from the international community.

19. International assistance to help the Central African Republic achieve its social, economic and financial goals could be of the following kind:

(a) Full implementation of commitments made by donors at the May 1994 meeting;

(b) Support to the Government to implement a strengthened structural adjustment programme;

(c) Support under the sectoral consultations and the Round-table Conference to be held in November 1995.

III. MADAGASCAR

A. Review of the implementation of decisions taken in 1991

1. Cyclone Cynthia

20. In February 1991, Cyclone Cynthia struck the entire western portion of Madagascar with unusually heavy rains resulting in disastrous flooding, particularly in the plains of Mahabo and Morondava.

21. Immediate emergency assistance, funded primarily by Switzerland and France, met the most urgent needs of the disaster victims.

22. Swiss Cooperation, through "Team Cynthia", initiated a broad programme of humanitarian aid, financed jointly by Swiss Cooperation (team operations, food purchases and workers' wages), UNDP (food purchases), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) (tool and food purchases), the World Food Programme (WFP) (organization of food shipments) and the European Development Fund (FED) (oversight and supervision of construction work).

23. The construction work involved the repair of the main canals, with the aim of putting the delta rice fields back under cultivation and the total reconstruction of the Dabara network. The programme succeeded in:

(a) Giving a boost to the economy of the region by providing three months of paid work to nearly 2,500 persons, thus compensating to some extent for the loss of agricultural income resulting from the destruction caused by the cyclone;

(b) Rehabilitating the Dabara canal using labour-intensive methods under the technical supervision of a specialized firm;

(c) Restoring food security for the inhabitants of the delta region by refilling the Hellot and Rebuffat canals.

24. The humanitarian aid programme gradually added a "development" component; Team Cynthia, which operated with good results through June 1992, demonstrated the feasibility of repairing the peripheral irrigation channels under a "food-for-work" programme. Future improvements to the peripheral irrigation channels could be considered using this approach, which actively involves the beneficiaries at all stages of the rehabilitation while providing them with income. It also laid the groundwork for establishing a professional agriculture structure to manage, supervise and maintain the facilities and networks.

2. Drought in the South

25. As a result of two poor rainy seasons in succession, southern Madagascar experienced a drought from 1991 to 1993. In order to avoid serious famine, WFP distributed free food to 960,000 people living in the region. From November 1991 to April 1993, nearly 50,000 metric tons were distributed under the leadership of the emergency team composed of some 10 supervisors.

26. An improvement in weather conditions made it possible to cease free food distribution in April 1993 and to move into a transitional phase between emergency relief and development through the funding of small-scale community projects on a "food-for-work" basis.

27. An initial phase, involving 152 small-scale projects, was carried out from June to December 1993. Some 6,000 people participated, and an estimated 93,000 people benefited from the programme.

28. This initial phase helped to improve food security by rehabilitating infrastructure directly or indirectly related to the production and marketing of food products (550 hectares of rice fields put back under cultivation, 142 kilometres of rural roads repaired). It also resulted in the preparation of reports based on surveys (of population groups, of monthly food status). But the most important accomplishment was the structuring of the rural environment around community focal points of development.

29. The second phase was carried out from January through June 1994. A report on it is pending.

30. Complementing the efforts of WFP, a national organization known as "SOS Sud Solidarité" was organized to provide survival assistance in the southern region. The region was declared a disaster area in March 1992. Assistance involved such activities as organizing soup kitchens, distributing cooked food to at-risk population groups and setting up nutrition rehabilitation centres. Financial assistance for the relief efforts was provided by the European Union, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), WFP, USAID, Finland, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Mauritius, Norway, La Réunion and the Seychelles.

31. As the SOS Sud operation wound up, the Office for the Integrated Development of the South took over with programmes designed to be more long-term and sustainable.

B. Report on events of 1994

32. In 1994, Madagascar was struck repeatedly by very powerful cyclones within a short space of time, causing major damage and flooding. The impact of four major cyclonic disturbances, Daisy (13-17 January), Geralda (2-4 February), Litanne (15-17 March) and Nadia (21-22 March) led to an emergency situation of exceptional gravity.

33. These cyclones affected virtually the whole of the island, but they were most severe in the province of Toamasina, especially in the village of Brickaville, which was especially hard hit. However, no estimate of the damage caused by the last two cyclones is yet available.

1. Impact of the cyclones

34. The cyclones Daisy and Geralda together left 231 people dead, 73 missing, 267 injured and 356,951 homeless. In addition, the displaced population of Antananarivo, the disaster victims in Toamasina, and the inhabitants of the flooded village of Brickaville, had to cope with water pollution and were exposed to epidemics, particularly the children. An estimated 250,000 people, including 48,000 children, were afflicted by these events. Moreover, 237,409 hectares of cultivated land were devastated, and many head of livestock were reported missing.

35. With regard to the infrastructure of the stricken areas, more than 20 major highways were damaged, cutting off the capital from the ports and from supply depots of essential goods. The railway network was severely impaired, causing communication problems and cutting off the supply of fuel to the capital. Also, the island's only oil refinery, located in Toamasina, was totally destroyed and would require four to six months to rebuild.

36. In addition to the thousands of homes destroyed, many public buildings (schools, health facilities, government offices, markets) were damaged.

37. By resolution 48/234 of 14 February 1994, the General Assembly called upon the international community to provide additional emergency aid for Madagascar.

2. Contributions from donors

38. In the first few hours after cyclone Geralda struck, Madagascar received assistance in the form of a prompt intervention by France, providing food, medicines, water and electric power. Representatives of the NGO CARE International and UNICEF visited Brickaville to assess the situation and propose plans of action.

39. CARE International took charge of the distribution of food and the recovery and rebuilding of the Brickaville area and its population. Food distribution activities in the area ended in August, once it had been established that the local population's food supply had more or less returned to normal.

40. Food requirements were met by the following donors: USAID; WFP; UNICEF; UNDP; Swiss Cooperation; the European Community; and CARE International.

41. The WFP was in charge of food distribution in the Antananarivo reception centres. The World Health Organization (WHO) helped to determine requirements for medicines and medical/surgical equipment and coordinated the work of an inter-agency committee on medicines.

42. UNICEF unblocked $50,000 to meet the immediate needs for medicines, $250,000 for follow-up work with children, and $2 million for crop rehabilitation.

43. In all, Madagascar received approximately 2,000 tons of rice, 2,500 tons of flour, and 5,000 tons of miscellaneous foodstuffs, medicines, building equipment and materials, technical assistance, and $3.5 million in cash.

44. Logistic operations were financed by the Governments of the Netherlands and Norway, and the United Kingdom, by USAID, and the Austrian branch of CARE International.

45. In April, a multi-donor mission organized by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and WFP which was also open to other partners, assisted the Government in assessing damage to agricultural infrastructures, crop losses and the consequences of the damage and losses.

46. A seed distribution programme began in July with the assistance of FAO.

3. Needs still unmet

47. Madagascar has realized that, being a country vulnerable to frequent cyclones, it will be necessary to:

(a) Create a national fund for the repair of cyclone damage;

(b) Set up a network for follow-up work and information on natural disasters, with sufficient equipment and supplies;

(c) Strengthen measures for soil protection and restoration;

(d) Improve the system of statistical information on available rice stocks;

(e) Carry out regular road maintenance.